



Dear Senate Leader McConnell, Speaker Ryan, Senate Minority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader Pelosi,

We are religious and moral leaders of the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival. This summer, the Campaign launched the most expansive wave of nonviolent civil disobedience in the 21st century. In more than 40 states and Washington, D.C., thousands of people participated in this season of moral resistance, calling attention to the ongoing War on the Poor.

This war, fueled by policies passed and endorsed from the state house to the congress to the White House, is especially violent towards our children.

To address this pressing moral failure, we invite you to convene a hearing in September to focus on the policy violence against our children.

We refuse to let our faith be used as a justification for policies that harm the most vulnerable in our society. We cannot tear families apart, nor can we jail them together. Children must be released to their families and families must be allowed to proceed through the asylum process outside of a jail cell. We must preserve foundational programs to children's health and well-being such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). And all children deserve a quality public education free from fear of being pushed out and locked up.

Anything less is a modern day form of violence and abuse against children.

Our Campaign is made up of mothers in Flint whose children still cannot drink or bathe in clean water; fathers who fear police violence against their young boys; undocumented parents whose children have been taken away from them; indigenous communities whose next generations live and play in contaminated lands; youth who have lived in homes where their heat was turned off during the winter; low-wage workers who have skipped meals to feed their children; homeless teenagers abused by the juvenile justice system; veterans sent off to war that perpetuates violence against school children in countries halfway around the world, while their own families struggle to make ends meet; parents who have lost custody of their children because they could not afford to pay their water bills.

These are not just isolated communities and individual stories, according to our research, there are 140 million poor and low-income individuals in this country; 43% of all American children live below the minimum income level necessary to meet basic family needs. There are nearly 14 million families who cannot afford water and at least 4 million families with children who are exposed to high levels of lead. LGBTQ youth represent up to 40% of the homeless youth population. At the US/Mexico border, there are 550 children who are still not reunited with their families. In states across the country, children are being starved and abandoned by pervasive policy decisions that cut vital programs. And around the world, women and children account for 68% of the rising civilian deaths from our wars.

The Talmud reminds us “By the breath of children God sustains the world” (Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 119b). “Suffer the little children to come unto me,” Jesus said, warning elsewhere that “if anyone causes one of these little ones who trust me to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.” Like the prophets before him, Jesus insisted that children matter because they bear the image of God.

For far too long, cynical political operatives have exploited our faith communities’ concern for children by claiming to be “pro-life” while supporting policies that harm children. From the border to the dining room table, children are being harmed by policies that put them last, placing boulders in their path.

The violence perpetrated against children in these times is a moral emergency. We implore Congress to convene a hearing about this violence against our children. Somebody has been hurting our children and it has gone on far too long and we won’t be silent anymore.

Sincerely,

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